



MENTAL HEALTH, ANXIETY AND COVID-19: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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INTRODUCTION

Since December 2019 the world has been facing an outbreak of a novel infectious disease known as Coronavirus disease (COVID-19), that has rapidly spread globally and has now been declared as a pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2020). Its spread and lethality is proving to be higher than previous epidemics on account of international travel density and immune naivety of the population (Docia et al. 2020), triggering urgent, draconian public health measures in many countries. This has caused an unprecedented situation for citizens, policy makers, politicians and healthcare professionals, with the pandemic being described as the worst public health crisis in a generation.

The COVID-19 pandemic also had a major effect on our lives. Many of us are facing challenges that can be stressful, overwhelming, and cause strong emotions in adults and children. Public health actions, such as social distancing, are necessary to reduce the spread of COVID-19, but they can make us feel isolated and lonely and can increase stress and anxiety. With the effects of COVID-19 on our physical health increasingly documented, we can no longer collectively fail to notice its effects on our mental health (UNDP). Currently, all of us are experiencing emotions, thoughts and situations we have never experienced before. In India, the first and foremost responses to the pandemic have been fear and a sense of clear and imminent danger (NIMHANS).

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a dramatic loss of human life worldwide and presents an unprecedented challenge to public health, food systems and the world of work. The economic and social disruption caused by the pandemic is devastating: tens of millions of people are at risk of falling into extreme poverty, while the number of undernourished people, currently estimated at nearly 690 million, could increase by up to 132 million by the end of the year (WHO, October 2020).

This pandemic situation not only affects physical health, mental health as well as economic sector but also ruined future education system. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), over 800 million learners from around the world have been affected, 1 in 5 learners cannot attend school, 1 in 4 cannot attend higher education classes, and over 102 countries have ordered nationwide school closures. Instead of regular teaching-learning process COVID confined the children and youth in different gadgets in terms of DIGITAL LEARNING. Such prolonged confinement also create enormous mental hazards

among the children as well as youths.

Social isolation, confined digital life, media, uncertainty, mental stress etc continuously breakdown man's mental strength and disturbed our mental health. Anxiety, one of the main evaluated subjects, has been significantly increasing in society during this pandemic (Huang and Zhao, 2020; Teufel et al., 2020). In addition, according to World Health Organisation (WHO), 1 in 3 globally suffers from anxiety. In the first year of COVID-19 pandemic, global prevalence of anxiety and depression increased by a massive 25%. Harmful behavioural consequences can derive from the condition of anxiety, including excessive hand washing, social withdrawal, panic purchasing and overspending in resources such as hand sanitizers, medications and protective masks (Asmundson and Taylor, 2020b). Interestingly, groups with less education seem to be more susceptible to these manifestations in an epidemic context, especially due to unreliable access to information and apprehension to its academic formation (Pfefferbaum and North, 2020). Fortunately, anxiety disorders are treatable, and the vast majority of people with an anxiety disorder can be helped with professional care (ADAA).

In the context of the discussion delineated above, it is clear that the COVID-19 pandemic thus presents a unique opportunity to study people's perception toward mental health. Therefore, using an online based study, we aimed to assess the general perceptions towards anxiety during COVID-19 pandemic, explore the associated behavioural change due to anxiety and their perceptions towards anxiety management.

METHODOLOGY

The present survey was conducted on 130 participants from Manipur and West Bengal. Only adult married male and females were designated as respondents for this study. Data were obtained independently by four authors (Dr. Moirangthem Kabita Devi, Dr. Shougaijam Brajeshwari Devi and Moirangthem Johnson Singh from Manipur and Jayita Roy Tapadar from West Bengal), using the GOOGLE FORM questionnaire form 19/03/2022 to 20/03/2022. Questionnaire were sent to the respondents via Whatsapp groups and individual mobile number randomly. All subjects reported their demographic data, COVID-19 related information, and completed questionnaires which assessed their generalized perception towards anxiety, behavioural changes etc. Demographic variables included gender (male or female), age, educational qualification, family type.

Prior to undertaking the survey, participants were informed

of the purpose of the study and provided informed consent. Participant could withdraw from the survey at any moment without providing any justification.

All the questions were based only on the self-perceptions of the respondents. The study does not involve any clinical/ medical diagnosis. Analysis has been done using simple statistics like percentage, mean, standard deviation (only for age) etc. Both the qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analysed.

FINDINGS:

Socio-Economic Profile of the Respondents:

Category	Manipur	West Bengal
Male	40.26 ± 1.22*	41.03 ± 0.91*
Female	38.52 ± 0.98*	39.66 ± 1.01*

(* = p > 0.05)

Table 1: Age wise distribution of the respondent of two States

Category	Manipur	West Bengal
Family members no. ≤ 4	74%	77%
Family members no. ≥ 5	26%	23%

Table 2: Family size wise distribution of the respondent ("two States")

Category	Manipur	West Bengal
Annual Family Income ≤ 10 Lakh	83%	78.12%
Annual Family Income > 10 Lakh	17%	20.88%

Table 3: Economic level wise distribution of the respondent ("two States")

Table no 1, 2 and 3 represents age wise, family size wise and annual family income wise (%) distribution of respondents of both the states. Table 1, represents that there is no age wise significance difference.

Table 2, represents that most of the families of both Manipur and West Bengal (33 and 45 respectively) having member numbers ≤ 4.

Table 3, represents that most of the studied families of Manipur (83%) and West Bengal (78.12%) have ≤ 10 Lakhs annual family income.

ANXIETY AND ITS ASSOCIATED ALBEHAVIOUROF THE RESPONDENTS:

Table 4 reveals that majority of the respondents from Manipur (59.69%) and West Bengal (60.08%) found difficult to control anxiety, 18.46% and 20.67% found difficult to control sadness, 6.92% and 3.44% of the respondents found difficult to control anger, 6.15% and 5.99% of the respondents found difficult to handle excitement and remaining 5.39% and 3.44% reported that they had difficulty in controlling other emotions for Manipur and West Bengal respectively.

Emotions	Percentage of respondents Manipur	Percentage of respondents West Bengal
Happiness	3.39%	2.51
Excitement	6.15%	5.99
Sadness	18.46%	20.67
Anxiety	59.69%	60.08
Anger	6.92%	7.31
Any other	5.39%	3.44
Total	100	100

Table 4 which emotion do you feel is most difficult to control during COVID pandemic?

Emotions	Percentage of respondents Manipur	Percentage of respondents West Bengal
Happiness	1.39%	0.99
Excitement	7.20%	3.43
Sadness	21.00%	22.43
Anxiety	65.00%	68.24
Anger	3.02%	3.29
Any other	2.39%	1.62
Total	100	100

Table 5. Which one of the following emotions persists over for the longest time due to Covid pandemic?

Behavioral/Lifestyle Changes During COVID-19 Pandemic

The study examines the anxiety related behavioural and lifestyle changes during covid-19 pandemic as presented in Table 6 below.

Behavioral and Lifestyle Changes	Yes	No
Panic buying of essential food items	73.85% (96)	26.15% (34)
Storing Covid-19 related medicines	55.38% (72)	44.62% (58)
Taking precautionary medicines like zinc, vitamin capsules, homeopathic medicine without consulting any physician	43.08% (56)	56.92% (74)
Sudden change in food habit	61.54% (80)	38.46% (50)
Overthink about your children and elderly people at home	86.92% (113)	13.08% (17)
6. Excessive washing and sanitizing hands	91.54% (119)	8.46% (11)

Table 6, Do you agree that there has been changes in the following behavioral and lifestyle ways due to COVID-19 pandemic for both the states?

Notwithstanding the lower percentage of respondents witnessing behavioral change of taking precautionary medicines like zinc, vitamin capsules, homeopathic medicine without consulting any physician (43.00%), majority of the respondents witness change towards various Behavioral and Lifestyle Changes like Panic buying of essential food items (73.85%), Storing Covid-19 related medicines (55.38%), Sudden change in food habit (61.54%), Overthink about children and elderly people at home (86.92%), Excessive washing and sanitizing hands (91.54%). (As there were no any remarkable differences in anxiety level or the emotional level we accumulated all the resonance in one table.)

Factors Contributing to Anxiety

Form of media	Percentage of respondents	Number of respondents
Television	32.32%	42
Radio	3.07%	04
Print media	8.46%	11
Social networking sites	46.15%	60
Social circle / neighbours	10.00%	13

Table 7: Choose one form of media that affects you most during COVID 19 pandemic?

Post covid nervousness	Yes	No
	83(63.84%)	47(36.15%)

Table 8. Did you feel more nervous when there is minor health problem in this post COVID situation?

Table 8 indicate majority of the respondents (63.84%) feel nervous over minor health problem in this post COVID situation.

Strategies to Manage Anxiety:

[This is based on WHO: Tips and advice for mental health]

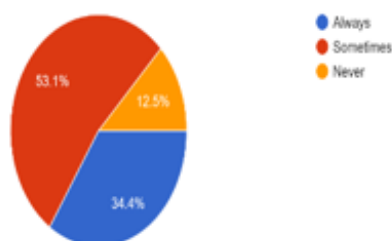
Strategies	Yes	No
Meditation	25(19.23%)	105(80.77%)
Physical Exercise	54(41.53)	76(58.46)
Recreation	29(22.30%)	101(77.69%)
Pursuing hobbies	51(39.23%)	79(60.77)
Consult with physician/ professional	11(8.46)	119(91.54)

Table 9: did you follow the following tips to strengthen your mental health?

[Indication: More oriented towards self-management rather than expert consultation/clinical diagnosis]

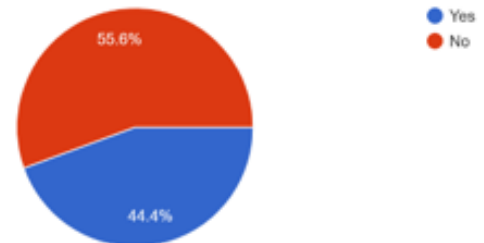
Picture 1

Q11. Did you overthink about your children and elderly people because of pandemic wave?
128 responses



Picture 2

Q12. Did you or any of your family member was affected by CORONA?
126 responses



DISCUSSION

The above study was done on 130 adult married population of Manipur (mean age of males 40.26 ± 1.22 ; females 38.52 ± 0.98 and West Bengal (males 41.03 ± 0.91 ; females 39.66 ± 1.01) respectively. The age revealed no significance differences ($p > 0.05$) for both the sexes. Almost all the males and females of the present study were economically independent, and they were at least graduate or had more educational qualifications.

The study revealed that there is a significant relationship with family size, income level and with the anxiety level respectively. The anxiety level is much higher in case of small family member (family member no. 3-5) specially who have children and dependent elders. Most of them answered through the Google form that they were anxious/ disturbed/ depressed/ feared etc. regarding the future of their dependent family members. Both male and female participants have answered in the same way. They describe their cause of mental disturbance/ anxiety in terms of economic loss, children's education, fear of termination of service due to National lockdown as well as fear of death of them due to COVID 19 etc. but most of the respondents from joint family or extended family type were less worried than those of nuclear family type.

Present study also shown us a relationship with the annual family income and anxiety level. The anxiety in terms of economic instability was higher in case of relatively lower economic group ($\leq 5-10$ lakhs annually) than those of others for both the sex and for both the States. Many of them have reported that they had invested or insured their money for future medical as well as economic purposes in absence of them for the fear of COVID PANDEMIC

The tables of result section revealed that how COVID pandemic engulf the mental peace of the studied population. Almost 57.69% of population has answered that it was difficult for them to control COVID related anxiety. Most of them also reported that different kinds of media specially Social media (46.15%) and Television (32.32%) had a great impact on their mental anxiety.

The study also expressed that from this mental anxiety most of the respondent change their day to day behaviour in terms of over storage of food items due to prolonged National Lockdown,

unnecessarily storing of essential medicines (COVID related), taking different medicines like Zinc Capsules, Vitamin Capsules, immunity boosters, Hot immunity boosting tea, hot water without consulting any physician. They all do those by knowing from different media or who had already recovered from COVID. These all kinds of activities creates many health hazards afterwards. But due to the fear and anxiety they do all these things. Although WHO have tips and advice for mental health, but table no 9 reveals that very low percentage of respondents manage their anxiety according to that proforma.

The respondents also reported that they sometimes engaged themselves in different recreational activities like watching movies, spending time with children, playing and doing physical exercises (41.53%), Pranayama/meditation (19.23%), spending time with their hobbies (51%), reading books, cooking different restaurant style foods etc.

CONCLUSION

The present study was an attempt to find out the mental stress and anxiety in relation with COVID 19 Pandemic in a less affected area (MANIPUR) and relatively High affected area (WEST BENGAL) of both adult and economically independent males and females with no significant age differences. Although the affected and mortality rate was very high in West Bengal than that of Manipur, but almost all the respondents responses alike regarding the fear and anxiety of COVID and its consequences. Almost 50.4% of total population think to run away to a safer place with their family members. Although maximum of the participants (92.2%) always follow COVID protocols, but due to the fear and anxiety regarding COVID 19 all were in mental trauma. Almost all of them wants to fight against COVID in their NEW NORMAL LIFE armed with Vaccination, proper hygiene habits, maintaining COVID Protocol, eating healthy food, doing regular physical exercises and spending time with constructive habits rather than wasting time in news of COVID from different media etc.

Although this was a very small scale study, but we had got very interesting and inferential responses regarding COVID 19 Pandemic fear and anxiety among the population. In future we shall engaged ourselves to perform this study on a large scale

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